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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: TAIWAN'S POLITICAL SITUATION

¶1. Summary: Amid the extensive reporting on former DPP Chairman Shih Ming-teh's campaign to oust President Chen Shui-bian, Taiwan's news coverage August 31 also focused on President Chen's planned overseas trip. The pro-status quo "China Times" ran a banner headline on page four that read "U.S. Refusing to Allow 'Air Force One' to Land, Bian's Overseas Trip May Either Take Commercial Airplane Or Not Transit Guam." The pro-independence "Liberty Times," Taiwan's biggest daily, also ran a news story on page four with the headline "President's Overseas Trip Plans to Transit Guam; Will Take Air Force One on His Way [to Palau] and Fly with China Airlines on His Way Back." In terms of U.S. arms sales to Taiwan, the "Liberty Times" ran a banner headline on page four that said "Regarding U.S. Arms Procurements, Lee Jye: Ma Sent Message Saying Bill Will Be Handled in New Legislative Session."

¶2. In terms of editorials and commentaries, an editorial in the pro-unification "United Daily News" said that on the surface the ongoing political movements in Taiwan seem to be aimed at anti-corruption and President Chen's ouster, but they actually reflect Taiwan society's feelings of powerlessness and loss toward constitutional democracy. A commentary in the limited-circulation, conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" said the United States' attitude is crucial to President Chen's survival. An opinion piece in the limited-circulation, pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times," however, said the campaign to oust Chen is a charade that is meant to prepare the KMT for the 2008 presidential elections. A separate "Taipei Times" editorial said if the campaign to oust Chen is indeed a charade to protect KMT Chairman Ma Ying-jeou and prepare him for future presidential elections, it is not working very well, because Ma seems unable to control his troops. End summary.

A) "Two Criteria for Scrutinizing Taiwan's Constitutional Democracy"

The pro-unification "United Daily News:" [circulation: 400,000] editorialized (8/31):

"For the on-going political movements [in Taiwan], they may look on the surface like they are aimed at anti-corruption and Bian's ouster. But on a deeper level, they actually reflect the entire Taiwan society's feelings of powerlessness and loss toward constitutional democracy. ... Two criteria may be adopted to scrutinize Taiwan's constitutional democracy. First, the general criterion of a constitutional democracy can be used to examine Taiwan's constitutional democracy. Second, since Beijing is the biggest threat to Taiwan's survival and development, the criterion of 'whether it can address cross-Straits problems' can also be applied to examine Taiwan's constitutional democracy. ...

"... In terms of the general criterion of a constitutional

democracy, our constitutional democracy is in fact disqualified. Our government is not governed by the constitution, nor are our people able to maintain social justice in accordance with the constitution. Taiwan may as well be regarded as an 'unconstitutional country.' ... There is no possibility that Taiwan will return to its previous authoritarian period governed by the martial law, so it has no choice but to deal with Beijing's threats using constitutional democracy. Yet if constitutional democracy is incapable of resolving the political polarity between 'Taiwan independence and anti-Taiwan independence,' and of following [the people's] desire for westbound economics, the crisis of Taiwan's survival is akin to being secretly concealed in its malfunctioning and paralyzed constitutional democracy. ..."

#### B) "U.S. Is Crucial to Chen's Survival"

Dr. William Fang, special to the conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" [circulation: 30,000] noted (8/31):

"... Indeed, U.S. support may be one of the few remaining pillars that the president can rely on for the survival of his administration amid the current nation-wide outcry for him to step down to take responsibility for alleged power abuses. ... The most important reason that President Chen is still able to hang on there is his unparalleled unscrupulousness as well as the firm backing of a small minority of hard-headed and biased 'deep green' people and the willing collaboration from some high corrupt party and government officials, including prosecutors and judges. Of course, the United States, Taiwan's strongest ally, views the whole developments currently unfolding on the island from the perspective of its national interests.

"The most important question being asked by the U.S. must be: Is Chen still able to control the situation and maintain the stability on the island that will continue to benefit the United States? The 'one million people to depose the president' must try to convince Washington that the answer is no. It is reported that Yu Shyi-kun, the chairman of the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), will soon fly to the U.S. to argue the case for the president. It is imperative that the anti-Chen camp should also do all it can to sway American public opinion. Efforts should be made to explain to Americans that the majority of the Taiwan population now believe Chen is so morally and politically unfit to lead the nation that he must step down right away, otherwise Taiwan, an important ally of the U.S. in the Asia-Pacific region, will face a prospect of chaos, violence and even bloodshed. If Chen is allowed to serve out his second term until 2008, Taiwan will probably lie in ruins under the rule of such an incompetent, immoral and unrepentant person. Will such a weakened Taiwan serve the national interests of the U.S.?  
..."

#### C) "Counting the Days to the Election"

Nat Bellocchi, former chairman of the AIT and now a special adviser to the Liberty Times Group, opined in the pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] (8/31):

"These days, Taiwanese media spend almost all of their energy on producing stories about the need for President Chen Shui-bian to step down, despite the lack of judicial evidence that he has committed any illegal act. The purpose of all this is not primarily to destroy the president, but to keep him and his government occupied on this issue while the pan-blue opposition prepares for the forthcoming elections. ... For the two most important countries for Taiwan, the US and China, there will be much uncertainty. The uncertainty for China will be the greatest. Even if the KMT wins - which most people believe is best for China - to what extent that party will be able to pursue its objectives is questionable, as a large part of the population is not supportive of the KMT's platform.

"Further, even if the KMT's objective of a closer relationship with China is fulfilled, this is far short of what Beijing wants. If on the other hand, the DPP can win both the legislature and the presidency, China may have the difficult task of developing a policy that will not overly challenge the US. For the US, the hope is for a KMT that will not move too close to China, or a DPP that can

develop a better relationship with China. The US will likely continue its present policies. The key question will be whether the US can have a more effective dialogue with a Taiwan that remains an important partner in a growing region. There are crucial changes ahead that could determine the future of Taiwan's democracy and its national identity. The people of Taiwan will make that decision. But what they now seem to be doing is accepting a step toward a different kind of democracy, and that is only 19 months ahead."

D) "Ma's Enemies Take Their Chance"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] editorialized (8/31):

"If former American Institute in Taiwan chairman Nat Bellocchi is to be believed, the push to oust President Chen Shui-bian is a charade that is meant to protect Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) Chairman Ma Ying-jeou from unpleasant scrutiny as he goes about preparing his party for the presidential election in a year-and-a-half's time. If this is the case, the charade is not working. If anything, forces in the KMT are now using the maverick campaign to undermine Ma, accusing him of being a pushover. Presumably, these KMT hardliners would prefer Ma lead an armed assault on the Presidential Office with a few thousand stormtroopers in tow, or at least join the sit-in and pout for a few hours like former President chairman Lien Chan after the last presidential election. ...

"Ma claims that he has 'hardened up.' Unfortunately, this is not reflected in Ma taking his own line and sticking to it, but in taking a harder line to disarm blue-camp extremists. This is not political strength, nor is it pragmatism; it is flat-footed, wishy-washy and manipulable behavior. ... Reforming the KMT was always going to involve some bloodletting, but now it seems that Ma will have a serious struggle on his hands to achieve this. If Ma cannot control his troops, the DPP will be able to ask: 'Who will really have power in a KMT government and can they be trusted?' The skeletons in the KMT's closet are too many and too odious for the pan-green camp not to be able to exploit this angle, despite its complacency and ham-fisted politicking of late, and despite growing alienation among voters. If things continue in this direction, the DPP will be thrown a lifeline for an election that it should never have been able to win."

YOUNG